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SUBJECT: BENIN: LOCAL NGO ISSUES ALTERNATIVE REPORT ON THE STATE OF THE NATION

REF: COTONOU 44

[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY: On January 15, Joseph Djogbenou, the President of Human Rights, Peace and Development NGO (DHPD-ONG) publicly presented an Alternative Report on the State of the Nation in response to President Yayi's December 30, 2008 State of the Nation Address (Reftel). Djogbenou said that President Yayi's speech on the State of the Nation had not reflected the mixed situation that Beninese citizens faced in 2008, for it had concealed the major flaws in the government's track record. The Alternative Report, which was distributed to the audience at the end of the presentation, indicates that President Yayi's achievement in 2008 was problematic in the areas of political, economic, social and cultural governance. The Alternative Report on the State of the Nation is the first of its kind since Benin opted for democracy in [1](#)1990. Emboff attended its launching. END SUMMARY

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Political governance  
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[1](#)2. (U) Joseph Djogbenou's Alternative Report on the State of the Nation dated January 15, 2009, denounces the government's management of the April 20 and May 1, 2008 local and municipal elections that resulted in numerous irregularities and fraud allegations. It notes also the government's attempt to control the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENA) during the April and May local and municipal elections, the suspension of the electoral process and the subsequent delay in the inauguration of the newly elected mayors. The report stresses the tense relations between the government and the institutions of the Republic. A case in point is the resulting deadlock in the national assembly, which forced President Yayi to enact twice by decree. It evokes also the climate of generalized suspicion in the National Assembly that led deputies to set up an investigative committee to look at the President of National Assembly's management. President Yayi's unpreparedness and haste in making outstanding political decisions are denounced with reference to his controversial decision to create new capitals in departments which did not have one. The report blames the President for failing to reach a political consensus in forming his 30-member cabinet on October 22, 2008. The report finally points out that the unity of major opposition groups against President Yayi ahead of the 2011 presidential election is symptomatic of 'UQP /QU\$Qhe sale of used cars, which did not conform to financial management rules. Based on the findings of the Front of National Organizations Against Corruption (FONAC), DHPD accuses the government of failing to prosecute Beninese officials that faced allegations of corruption. It reports also allegations against President Yayi's government over cases of illegal awards of public procurement in the health sector. However, DHPD hails President Yayi for making considerable efforts to address price inflation, and for engaging in extensive infrastructure development in the country during 2008.

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Social and Cultural governance  
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[1](#)4. (U) The document contends that the Government did not take adequate and diligent measures to solve the food crisis that the country faced in 2008. Also, it notes that the government failed to implement its decision to make registration free for Benin National University's students, which led to a student strike at the beginning of the academic year 2008-2009. In the same vein, the

government has not to date enforced its decision to make health care free for children aged 0-5. The report mistakenly states that the decision to make caesarean birth free for women lies dormant (Note: In point of fact the Ministry of Health is pushing aggressively to incorporate the service into its action plan. End Note.) The report underlines that, though the government endeavoured to satisfy some of the workers claims by increasing their salaries and paying arrears, relations between it and unions remained tense during

COTONOU 00000057 002 OF 002

2008. According to the report, the government violated the freedom of the press by inflicting administrative sanctions upon journalists who criticized its policies during 2008.

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Methodology used for drafting the report  
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15. (SBU) DHPD NGO tasked three experts with producing the first draft of the Alternative Report. Then, it collected first hand information on governance from ministries, the Secretary General of the Government, the institutions of the Republic, and political parties. Finally, DHPD NGO Board of Directors used the initial draft made by the experts and the findings of the survey to finalize the report in six weeks time. The last version of the report came after President Yayi gave his speech on December 30, 2008, which enabled DHPD to adjust its analysis to the content of the speech. (NOTE: DHPD NGO is a serious and well known association that works for the promotion of democracy, good governance and human rights. In 2006, it played a crucial role in fighting to prevent former President Kerekou from amending the constitution to stay in power. In 2008, DHPD issued successively a Report on the Rule of Law and Democracy, and an Assessment Report on the April 20 and May 1 Local Elections. Joseph Djogbenou, the President of DHPD NGO, is considered by some to be a brilliant lawyer and University teacher. Many in the population highly appreciate his relevant and deep analysis on various political issues. END NOTE)

16. (SBU) COMMENT: DHPD ONG's Alternative Report on the State of the Nation is a novel analysis of the state of the nation from a different perspective. The report appears to be an attempt to give a balanced and even handed commentary on the Yayi government to date. END COMMENT

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